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ABSTRACT

The community-based college is both community and learner oriented. It is a cooperator with the community in joint meaningful human endeavors. The Junior College District of Metropolitan Kansas City will open as a Fourth College of the District, a college without walls. This college will take into account the need for community-based, performance-oriented learning, as opposed to the offerings of traditional colleges. Already in operation as a first phase of the undertaking is the Metropolitan Institute of Community Services, which serves some 6,000 "new students" in community-based programs. If education is to be truly community based, the means must be found to reach all potential learners and assist them in the continuous process of "self-renewal," both individually and collectively. (DB)

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"WHAT IT MEANS TO BE COMMUNITY-BASED"

by

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presented at the

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What does it mean to be community-based?

When I think of the community college with respect to this question, I'm reminded of Dickens' Tale of Two Cities:

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way..."*

The community college today, like the Tale of Two Cities, is a study of comparison and contrast. While the community college has always claimed to be community-oriented, in many cases, this is still more rhetoric than fact...in far too many instances we're still more "junior" than "community."

JC 740 409

* Chapter I -- The Period

Heretofore, we have cast ourselves as "givers" -- the benevolent institutions in the community that would help the community solve its problems; but we have remained college-based. The community can ask for our help in problem-solving; but the community seldom does -- especially if there is a university available in the area. Oh, we've investigated the probable employment needs of business and industry to meet those of our two-year graduates, the kinds of noncredit short courses our facilities might be interested in offering, and how well our transfer programs are preparing students to enter senior colleges. Traditionally, our community colleges have been concerned with only small segments of the total community: high school graduates requiring geographical and financial access to low-cost further education; those interested in preparing for gainful employment at the end of one or two years; others wanting skills to upgrade their performance on the job or eligibility for promotion; people whose previous educational experiences have precluded their acquiring the necessary skills to move into the higher echelons of learning; and individuals whose ephemeral appetites for knowledge have dictated community services programs.

But there are reservoirs of learners our community colleges have left virtually untouched. We have overlooked those who cannot afford the time or cost of conventional further education; those whose interests and talents are not served by traditional education; those whose educational progress has been interrupted by illness, military service, or other temporary conditions; those who are elderly and have come to accept the questionable blessings of retirement. And there are many more.

Because these people constitute part of the community our colleges are supposed to serve, some attention must be paid to their needs. But more is required than just expanding

access to the "new students," if our institutions are to become "community-based." And merely offering courses in convenient locations throughout the community does not in itself constitute "community-based" education.

Faithful to the literature of the community education field, most of our community colleges, from their inception, have regarded their role as being "catalysts for bringing community resources to bear on community problems." Moreover, we've always been dedicated to "providing for the educational needs of all our community members." This aspect of our offerings was made manifest in our community services programs. We've used advisory councils and community needs assessment surveys as vehicles for encouraging community involvement in curriculum planning -- always, however, focusing such planning on the predefined student groups I mentioned a few minutes ago -- groups that by no means include all community members.

In our colleges' defense, I must point out that the course we chose to follow was dictated in large part by the precedent set by society -- the community, if you will -- itself. Ernest Boyer explains it this way:

> Historically, the span of human life has been chopped up into slices like a great salami, with each section having a special flavor all its own. First, there was the thin slice of early childhood -- the time of happy play. Then came a thicker slice -- twelve to twenty years, perhaps -- devoted almost exclusively to full-time learning. Next, we had the still thicker chunk of full-time work. And, finally, came retirement -- the little nubbin at the end -- characterized by some as "dignified decline."

Perhaps Alan Pifer's suggestion at the AACJC meeting last February was not as outrageous as he himself thought it to be; namely, that "...community colleges should start

thinking about themselves from now on only secondarily as a sector of higher education and regard as their primary role community leadership."

Pifer cast us in a key leadership role for reconstruction of American society, when he said:

> "Other institutions have a part to play, of course, but I see the community college as the essential leadership agency...they can become the hub of a network of institutions and community agencies -- the high schools, industry, the church, voluntary agencies, youth groups, even the prison system and the courts -- utilizing their educational resources and, in turn, becoming a resource for them."

Indeed, that's what we started out to do, and the fact that we have been sidetracked is less chargeable to our ineptness than to the adverse set of circumstances that surrounded our initial endeavors. Perhaps if our community colleges cut themselves loose from the constraints extraneously imposed and struck out in new directions that would lead toward effecting a truly community-based education, we might begin to live up to the reputation our PR people have advanced for us over the last 30 years.

First, of course, we must arrive at a mutually understood and accepted definition of what is meant by "community-based, performance-oriented, postsecondary education." We must go beyond the theoretical and philosophical concepts most of us educators are so fond of enunciating and get down to the nitty-gritty details of how we are going to implement this kind of education.

A friend of mine who has been associated with education all of her life recently remarked: "Communication is the 'in' word these days in every field of endeavor. Yet, among you educators, it's the one thing you seem to avoid. Your ideas and your discoveries

are couched in a language that sounds like some sort of code only you and your colleagues can understand. It's as if you were trying to keep them a secret from the very people you're supposed to serve."

And so, for a starter, I'd like to suggest a pragmatic definition of "community-based, performance-oriented, postsecondary education": Community-based, means delivering the kinds of education the community members want, not the kinds the colleges think they should have; at locations where the learners are, not where we think they should be; all of this determined by open community participation in defining comprehensive learning needs, suggesting solutions, and facilitating delivery. Performance-oriented, means that acquired competencies will fit the needs of the learner rather than the expectations of the teacher; so that competencies become more important than grades or credits and the learner can measure in his own terms achievement of an objective without reference to the teacher's evaluation of it. In other words, the welding student is able to weld.

A working definition of community-based, performance-oriented education is also suggested by example at a Florida community college. A course in "Aviation Landing" was developed to meet a community need. Called "Pinch Hitter" the course was not a course in flight technology, not a course that would prepare a participant to become licensed to fly -- but a course that would prepare the small aircraft passenger (non-pilot) to control and safely land a plane in an emergency in case anything happened to the pilot! Being able to do that was a felt need, and it originated in the community the college was serving. Definitely, the course was both community-based and performance-oriented.

The community-based college then is both community and learner oriented. It

allows the learner to begin where he is -- where his previous learning stopped -- progress at his own pace in accordance with his unique learning plan, and achieve competencies that are meaningful to him.

The community-based college is no longer merely a "giver" to those who are inclined to accept its gifts; its newer role is that of cooperator with the community in joint efforts to put people back together in meaningful human endeavors.

In the past, we have talked a great deal about "taking the college to the community." The community-based college recognizes the advantages of "bringing the community to the college" in terms that go beyond shared facilities or the establishment of extension centers.

And lastly, the community-based college recognizes the difference between offering to the community the educational experiences we think they should have and delivering the experiences they actually want and need.

Using the aforementioned definitions as a foundation for planning, the Junior College District of Metropolitan Kansas City, Missouri, will open in due course as a Fourth College of the District, a "college without walls," which will take into account the need for community-based, performance-oriented learning as opposed to what our traditional colleges have always offered: a physical location for a community of scholars to pursue an institution-based course of study. Already operational in Kansas City is a first phase of this undertaking, the Metropolitan Institute of Community Services.

What we hope to develop is an institution dedicated to the proposition that human renewal -- the personal upgrading of every citizen of our District -- is its primary and

overriding purpose; that rejects the notion that an individual's ability to accumulate credits or earn a degree is the ultimate measure of his worth; that sees as its main purpose helping community learners define their competencies -- both those they already have and those they want to develop -- and obtaining performance skills; that fully discharges its obligation to help every member of the community acquire the basic skills and understandings necessary to effective functioning in a world at flux; and that revitalizes efforts to generate a sense of responsibility for the future.

What is the Institute doing? Serving some 6,000 "new students" in community-based programs such as these:

1. A short course for newly elected municipal government officials, planned by a Mayors' advisory council to concentrate on the officials' duties and responsibilities as public servants.

2. A building trades program for out-of-school youth in house construction and building maintenance where prefabricated houses are constructed on sites obtained by and located in model cities neighborhoods.

3. A horseshoeing course taught by father and son which attracts persons from as far as 80 miles and is designed to equip community learners to shoe their own horses.

4. Occupational safety and health training seminars for some 2400 employees and employer representatives to familiarize them with the responsibilities of the OSHA Act.

5. "Pit-Stop" -- a course popular with teenagers and women desiring to learn the fundamentals of basic automobile tune-up.

6. A program in report writing for executives of auditing, finance and data processes branches of the Commerce Bank.

7. The Street Academy -- a storefront operation enrolling some 200 black high school dropouts, featuring activities such as "The Ghetto Workshop" (GED), "Black Moods" (creative arts), "Check Yourself" (health), "Express Yourself" (black history, black culture and black awareness in game situations), "Write On" (Journalism), "Respect Yourself" (poise and grooming), "Sock It to Me" (brothers' baseball), and "Black Anxiety" (creative dancing).

8. A course in blueprint reading and estimating for small construction contracting firms taught by a retired architect, to be followed by specially tailored programs in purchasing, financial record-keeping, construction project management, and legal/insurance/safety/contractor relationships.

And so many, many more!

If the education we propose is truly to be community-based, we must find the means to reach all potential learners in their totality and assist them in the continuous process of "self renewal," both individually and collectively. Only in this way will we be able to achieve the mission of improving the quality of life in America's communities that Pifer has suggested for us -- a mission of community restoration and renewal that will make impossible our modern "tale of two cities":

--A Kansas City with its idyllic riverfront setting, its beautiful parks -- and its ugly claustrophobic slums...

--A Kansas City of fine mansions -- and of miserable hovels.

--A city of incredibly affluent suburbs like Mission Hills, and condemned tenements of west Kansas City.

--A Kansas City of famous restaurants -- and hungry people.

--A city with the most attractive shopping center in the nation -- and dilapidated mom-and-pop store-fronts.

--A city where several thousand young Future Farmers of America convened recently to map their careers while several thousand young blacks convened on the street corners to map their careers.

--A Kansas City where so much is up to date, but a city which is also up to date in unemployment, in crime, in poor housing, in high school dropouts, in health care deficiencies.

--In short, a city much like other urban centers -- a city dedicated to citizenship -- and to narrow self interest, a city of rare promise -- and faltering hope.

--A city of goodwill toward all -- and a city of racial distrust. *

* Adopted from a speech by Ms. C. Delores Tucker, Secretary of State of Pennsylvania, to Kansas City, Missouri chapter of NAACP, October 26, 1974

But perhaps, as we become truly community-based institutions, it will be possible for us to play that badly needed key leadership role in the reconstruction of American society so that we too may share in the end Sydney Carton's vision of a better tomorrow:

> "I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss... fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement."

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